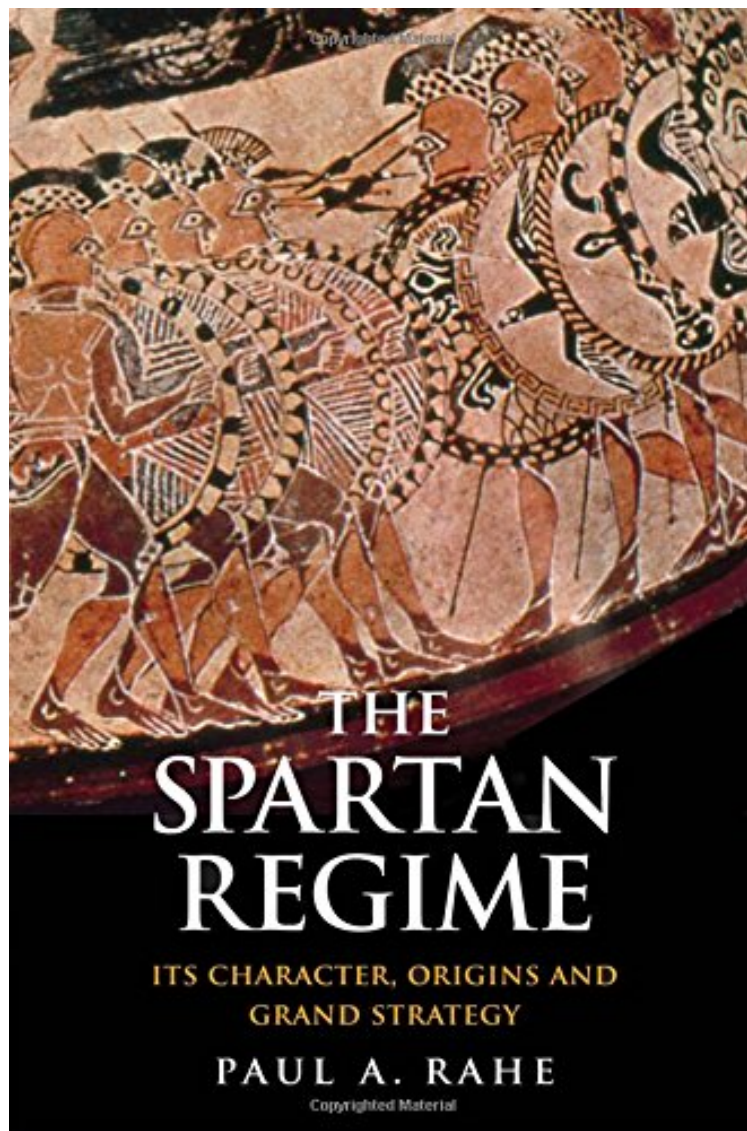


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## The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy (Yale Library of Military History)

*Paul Anthony Rahe*

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**Paul Anthony Rahe : The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy (Yale Library of Military History)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy (Yale Library of Military History):

27 of 27 people found the following review helpful. A Treasure to be CherishedBy ThucydidesSparta has loomed large in men's thinking down through the ages, from Rousseau, to John Stuart Mill, to the American founders. Many place names commemorate it, like Spartanburg, Laconia, etc., and it is common to name sports teams "Spartans." (I know of no team called "Athenians.") Sparta has stood for a vision of intense community and selfless citizenship. On the negative side, it has often been analogized, mistakenly I think, to modern fascist regimes. This volume serves as a prequel to the author's projected trilogy on Sparta, the first volume of which, *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta: The Persian Challenge*, has already been published. Here Rahe describes the Spartan *politeia*, a term which translates as "constitution," but means much more than that: it comprehends the manners, customs, and habits of a people. Of particular interest is his discussion of the rise of hoplite warfare with troops organized into phalanxes. Life for cities or polises in ancient Greece was perilous; warfare was constant, and capture of a city meant the men would ordinarily be put to the sword, and the women and children sold into slavery. In addition, the Spartans lived from the labor of *helots* consisting of the original population before the Spartans' invasion who were reduced to serfs, and who greatly outnumbered the Spartans. This required that the Spartans be trained from infancy to a life of military excellence to maintain the safety of the polis, and control of the *helots*. Yet all was not austerity; the Spartans had a rich artistic, musical, and literary life, though one not so impressive as that of the Athenians. Telling the story of the Spartans is a challenge; historical sources are scanty and fragmentary. The Spartans were a private people, and sought safety through non-involvement with others unless unavoidable, which was the case of the Persian invasion and the war with Athens. They practiced great secrecy. In this work of impressive scholarship, Rahe has drawn exhaustively on all that can be known to tell the story of this amazing people, so different from anything we know. The strangeness of the Spartans enables us to fundamentally rethink how we look at things, and to wonder about our own certainties. This work is an absolute treasure.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy J. KeithEnjoyed the read7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Institutional tools for preserving supremacyBy JPSBook bought through the UK site and review first posted there a few minutes ago... This is the author's second volume on Sparta, although I would advise to start with reading this one rather than the one about Sparta and the Persian Wars. This is because the present volume focuses on the city's institutions. It shows, among other things, how little is really known about them, to what extent their origins are shrouded in legend. One of the main merits of this excellent and clearly written book is to analyse the sources and develop plausible interpretations explaining the emergence and the instauration of Sparta's institutions. One finding is that the so-called reforms of Lycourgos and their original purpose can only be understood when put in the historical, political, social and economic context (7th century BC). Another related feature shows how at least some of these institutions, in particular the *Agoge* and the transformation of Sparta into a militarised city, were linked to the conquest of Messenia and the enslavement of its population. A third element is to show to what extent this conquest, which more than doubled the size of Sparta's territory, allowed it to become (at the time) the largest and one of the richest (and largely self-sufficient) cities of Greece, but also highly vulnerable. Unlike Corinth, Athens or others, it had no longer any need to develop trade or found colonies abroad. However, and also unlike any of these, full citizens (*Spartiates*) only represented a small fraction of the total population, and a fraction whose supremacy was maintained through force and subjugating the *helots*. A second set of features relate to the analysis of the key institutions – the two Kings, the *Gerousia* and the *Ephors* – and how these developed, were created to interact and curtail each other and could come into conflict. Here again, one of the book's main merits is to show that beyond the semi-legendary origins of each institution, the author provides convincing political explanations related to the need to address particular types of conflict and shows how they were meant to ensure that the "ruling class" could maintain its supremacy and remain united. A key part of this evolution, and one which the author believes (quite convincingly) to be closely linked to the conquest and subsequent domination of Messenia, is the rise of hoplite warfare and of the institutions related to it. The whole of Sparta's power and dominance was predicated upon maintaining the *helots* in what amounted to slavery and it is this that constitutes what the author terms her "Grand Strategy". Regardless of whether the use of this term is really apt or perhaps slightly misleading, the ultimate value of this book is to present a convincing explanation of what has long been seen as Sparta's "exceptionalism" when compared to all other Greek cities. Unlike them, Sparta managed to conquer, subdue and dominate for more than two and a half centuries one of its neighbours. All of its subsequent and strenuous efforts, including the foundation of the Peloponnesian League and its involvement in the Persian Wars or the Long War against Athens and her own League (and Empire in disguise) were heavily influenced (if not dictated) by its need to preserve and protect what was both the main source of its power and its main vulnerability. A five star read.

An authoritative and refreshingly original consideration of the government and culture of ancient Sparta and her place in Greek history. For centuries, ancient Sparta has been glorified in song, fiction, and popular art. Yet the true nature of a civilization described as a combination of democracy and oligarchy by Aristotle, considered an ideal of liberty in the ages of Machiavelli and Rousseau, and viewed as a forerunner of the modern totalitarian state by many twentieth-century scholars has long remained a mystery. In a bold new approach to historical study, noted historian Paul Rahe attempts to unravel the Spartan riddle by deploying the regime-oriented political science of the ancient Greeks,

pioneered by Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Xenophon, and Polybius, in order to provide a more coherent picture of government, art, culture, and daily life in Lacedaemon than has previously appeared in print, and to explore the grand strategy the Spartans devised before the arrival of the Persians in the Aegean.

"Persuasive."—Thomas E. Ricks, *New York Times Book*